The Government of the Roman Republic

In 509 BC, Romans overthrew Tarquin the Proud, the Etruscan king. They set up a Republic where people choose their rulers. This idea of a government chosen by the people would be a model for the founders of the United States. Not everyone had an equal say in the Roman Republic.

**Patricians**
Members of the oldest and richest families. They could hold public office. They could perform certain religious rituals. They were landowners. They lived in large houses. They had political power in the senate.

**Plebeians**
Were the poorer citizens. They paid taxes and served in the army. They lived in apartments. They could not marry patricians. They could not hold office if they went into debt they could be sold into slavery.

494 BC, the plebeians officially withdrew from Rome and declared an alternative government. 445 BC, plebeians gained the right to marry patricians.

**Consuls**
Two consuls, chosen each year, headed the Republic. They were administrators and military leaders. Each could veto the acts of the other. Both had to agree before a law was passed. In charge of the treasury. Commanders in chief of the army when at war.

**Senate**
300 senators were chosen for life. Handled daily problems of the government. The Senate advised the Consuls. Discussed foreign relations. Proposed laws. Approved public contracts for building roads and temples.

**Government Officials**
Judges, assemblies, and tribunes. Tribunes protected the rights of the plebeians. All Roman citizens belonged to the assembly. Assembly could declare war or make peace.
**Twelve Tables**

In 450 BC, Roman laws were written down. 12 bronze tablets were placed in the Forum. The laws applied to both plebeians and patricians. Most about wills, property rights, and court actions. They were the foundation for all future Roman Laws. Roman school boys had to learn the Twelve Tables by heart.

**Democratic Government**

Election of tribunes and recording of laws were the first steps. About 250 BC, no one could be sold into slavery for debt. Plebeians could hold public office.

**Roman Expansion**

Romans were afraid that the Etruscans would try to get Rome back. To protect their boundaries, the Romans conquered or made alliances with their neighbors. Rome went to war with the Samnites in 295 BC and defeated them. By 290 BC, Rome had control of all of central Italy. 275 BC, Romans ruled the whole peninsula. By 146 BC, Rome ruled the Mediterranean world. Then it took over the Greek cities to the south. By the middle of the 3rd century, Rome controlled all of the Italian peninsula.

**The Roman Army**

The Romans were able to gain territory because they had a strong army. The Roman Army was organized into about 30 legions. A legion was made up of 5000 heavily armored infantry foot soldiers. They were subdivided into ten cohorts, lead by a legatus. The basic unit was made up of 80 men and was called a century. There were 59 centuries in a legion. Staff officers were called tribuni. Senior non-commissioned officers were centurions. Cavalry was supplied by the auxiliaries and organized into 500 man units. The army used catapults to throw rocks. Engineers constructed siege towers and scaling ladders.

**Roman Legion**

Legion had advantages over the phalanx. It was smaller and could move faster. Phalanx fought as a group and attacked from only one direction. Each member of a legion depended on his own fighting ability. Groups of a legion could split off and attack from the sides and rear. Roman legions often carried dragon flags. Long pieces of cloth that when held in the wind gave the appearance of a dragon.

**Roman Forts**

Romans surrounded their camp with a moat and a dirt wall with pointed poles sticking out. Each soldier carried a pointed pole as part of their equipment. It only took a couple of hours to build a camp. There was a walkway for the sentries and blockhouses. The fort would also contain granaries, workshops and a place for soldiers to sleep. The bathhouse was built outside of the fort.
**Headquarters**
The headquarters was in the middle of the camp. It would contain a large room big enough to hold the entire legion. It also contained administrative offices and a strong room to hold valuables. There was also a shrine dedicated to the emperor and a place to store legion standards.

**Roman Standards**
Roman legions carried three or four standards to identify themselves. The most famous of these was the Roman eagle. It was a disgrace if the enemy captured the eagle. They carried a portrait of the emperor made from metal. They also carried the name and number of the legion. Famous victories would be included on the standards.

**Commander's House**
The commander's house would be built next to the headquarters. It was built around a central courtyard. It contained its own bathhouse.

**Soldiers**
During the early years all male citizens were required to serve in the army. Soldiers were expected to carry weapons, camp tools and provisions for two weeks. A Roman soldier's weapons were a short double-edged iron sword for stabbing. They had a throwing spear called a pilum. He wore armor made from iron. He wore a metal helmet on his head. A soldier carried a large rectangular shield which curved around his body. The Roman army was so successful because of discipline and hard training. The first to climb the wall of a city they were attacking received a gold crown. If you killed a man in battle you received a cup. If your company ran, every tenth man was clubbed to death.

**Roman Rule**
The Romans were mild rulers. The Romans gave the peoples of the conquered territories certain rights. All were required to send taxes and troops to Rome. The conquered people were expected to serve in the Roman army. Rome settled soldiers on the captive lands in permanent settlements. Some were allowed to become citizens. The Romans began a lava block road building project to connect all of their territories.

**The Punic Wars**
By 246 BC, the Romans conquered some Greek city-states in southern Italy.
This brought them into contact with the Phoenician city of Carthage. Carthage controlled the trading colonies of northern Africa and many of the Greek cities of Sicily. She was, in fact, the great merchant of the Mediterranean. She had grown wealthy by buying and selling the products of the East and the West. The purple of Tyre, the frankincense of Arabia, the linen of Egypt, the gold of Spain. The silver of the Balearic Isles, the tin of Britain, and the iron of Elba. She had formed commercial treaties with the chief countries of the world. She coveted not only the Greek cities of Sicily, but the Greek cities of Italy as well. Rome and Carthage became rivals for the possession of the western Mediterranean Sea.

The Origin of Carthage
This city was originally a colony of Tyre. It was the capital of a great commercial empire on the northern coast of Africa. The origin of Carthage, like that of Rome, is almost lost in the clouds of tradition. An old story tells us how Queen Dido was driven from Tyre. She landed in Africa with a band of fugitives. It is said that Dido purchased from the African princes as much land as an ox hide would cover. She had cunningly cut the hide into thin strips and encircled enough land, upon which to found a city. But all we really know of the origin of this city is that it was settled by Phoenicians from Tyre. It acquired dominion over the native races of Africa, the Lydians and the Numidians.

Government of Carthage
Carthage had the same kind of government as the Roman republic. The real power was exercised by a few wealthy and prominent families.

First Punic War
Outbreak of the War in Sicily (B.C. 264)
The First Punic War began in Sicily. It came to be a contest for the possession of that island. Sicily was controlled by 3 powers. Cathagenuans, King of Syracuse, and Campian soldiers who had been in service to the King of Syracuse. The soldiers attacked and ravaged Messina. King of Syracuse attacked the soldiers and they asked Carthage for help. Rome was friendly with Syracuse, but they didn't want Carthage to help. This began the First Punic War.

The War
A Roman army went to Sicily. The soldiers had already admitted a Carthaginian garrison into the city. Roman general, Appius Claudius, asked Carthaginian commander, Hanno, to a conference. Claudius seized Hanno and made him give up the city. Romans got Messina. Syracuse allied with Carthaginians to drive Romans out, but both armies lost. Syracuse then allied with Rome to drive the Carthaginians off the island. Town after town fell before the Roman army. In 262 BC, the second year of the war, the city of Agrigentum was captured, after a siege of seven months.

First Naval Power of the World
Then the Carthaginian fleet first appeared. The Carthaginians recovered most of the coast cities which had been lost to the Romans. It ravaged the coasts of Italy. By controlling the sea it made it difficult for Rome to send fresh troops to Sicily. The Romans only had a few ships. The Romans took a wrecked Carthaginian ship. They used it as a model and constructed a hundred vessels like it in sixty days. The Romans knew that their soldiers were better than the Carthaginians. They provided their ships with drawbridges which could be used in boarding the enemy’s vessels. Rome now ventured upon the sea as a rival of the first naval power of the world.

The War Confined to Sicily (B.C. 255-241)
For several years after this, the war languished in Sicily. The long series of Roman disasters was relieved by the capture of Panormus on the northern coast. This was soon followed by a second victory over the Carthaginians at the same place. It is said that the Carthaginians, after this second defeat, desired an exchange of prisoners.
Carthage sent Regulus to the Roman senate to advocate their cause. He promised that he would return if unsuccessful. But Regulus, it is said, persuaded the senate not to accept the offer of the Carthaginians. In spite of the tears and entreaties of his friends, went back to Carthage. After the Roman victories the Carthaginians were pushed into the extreme western part of the island. The Romans then laid siege to Lilybaeum, the stronghold of the Carthaginian power. But they failed to capture this place. The Roman consul, P. Claudius, determined to destroy the enemy’s fleet lying near Drepanum. He was defeated with the loss of over ninety ships. Then Rome lost other fleets by storms. After fruitless campaigns against the Carthaginian soldier, Hamilcar Barca, the Roman cause seemed a failure.

**Victory at the Aegates Islands (B.C. 241)**
Rome had lost one sixth of their population. They had spent a vast amount of their treasury. They still persisted in the attempt to conquer Sicily. Wealthy citizens advanced their money to build a new fleet. In this way two hundred ships were built and placed under the consul C. Lutatius Catulus. A decisive victory was gained at the Aegates Islands, off the western extremity of Sicily. The Carthaginians were unprepared for the terrible defeat.

**Results of the War**
They were obliged to sue for peace. They had to release all the Roman prisoners without ransom. They had to pay the Romans 3,200 talents (about $4,000,000), within ten years. Thus ended the first Punic war, which had lasted for twenty-three years.

**Hannibal and the Second Punic War**
Carthage was building up a great empire in the Spanish peninsula. She expected to raise new armies, with which to invade Italy. This was the policy of Hamilcar Barca, her greatest citizen and soldier. The work was begun by Hamilcar himself, and then continued by his son-in-law, Hasdrubal. Hasdrubal founded the city of New Carthage as the capital of the new province. Rome and Carthage made a treaty not to extend her territory beyond the river Iberus (Ebro), in Spain. Carthage continued conquering the southern part of Spain. Hasdrubal died. Hannibal, the young son of the great Hamilcar, and the idol of the army, was chosen as commander. He marched from New Carthage and proceeded to attack Saguntum, the ally of Rome. After a siege of eight months, Hannibal conquered Saguntum. The Romans sent an embassy to Carthage to demand the surrender of Hannibal. The story is told that Quintus Fabius, the chief Roman envoy, spoke to the Carthaginian senate. "Here we bring you peace and war; which do you choose?" "Give us either," was the reply. "Then I offer you war," said Fabius. "And this we accept," shouted the Carthaginians.

**Hannibal’s Invasion of Italy**
The Romans formed a plan to send two armies into the enemy’s country. One into Africa under Sempronius. The other into Spain under P. Cornelius Scipio. But Hannibal saw that Carthage would be safe if Italy were invaded and Rome threatened. Hannibal left his brother Hasdrubal to protect Spain. Hannibal crossed the Pyrenees with fifty thousand infantry, nine thousand cavalry, and 40 elephants. He pushed on to the river Rhone. He outflanked the barbarians, who were trying to oppose his passage. The Roman commander, P. Cornelius Scipio, sent his brother Cn. Scipio on to Spain with the main army. Scipio returned to Cisalpine Gaul, expecting to destroy Hannibal if he should come into Italy.
Hannibal in the meantime pressed on crossed the Alps.
He finally reached the valley of the Po River.
Hannibal had only twenty thousand foot soldiers and six thousand cavalry.
Here he recruited his ranks from the Gauls.
They eagerly joined his cause against the Romans.
Hannibal defeated all the Roman legions which were sent after him.
Rome refused to give in and kept sending army after army against him.
He fought on in Italy for fifteen years.
The Romans had attacked him and his bases in Spain and Africa.
But still they could not defeat him.

**Battle of Metaurus**
The battle which took place at the Metaurus was decisive.
It determined the issue of the second Punic war.
The army of Hasdrubal was entirely destroyed, and he himself was slain.
The first news which Hannibal received was from the lifeless lips of his own brother.
Hasdrubal's head was thrown by the Romans into the Carthaginian camp.
Hannibal saw that the death of his brother was the doom of Carthage.
He sadly exclaimed, “O Carthage, I see thy fate!”

**Return to Carthage**
In 203 BC, the Carthaginians withdrew.
They returned to defend Carthage against the Roman General Scipio.

**Battle of Zama**
In 202 BC, Hannibal was defeated by Scipio at the battle of Zama.
Hannibal fought at a great disadvantage.
His own army was reduced in number.
The new armies of Carthage could not be depended upon.
Scipio changed the order of the legions.
He left spaces in his line, through which the elephants of Hannibal might pass.
Hannibal was defeated.
The Carthaginian army was annihilated, twenty thousand men were slain.
The great war was now ended.

**Results of the War**
In 201 BC, Scipio imposed the terms of peace.
Carthage was to give up the whole of Spain and all the islands between Africa and Italy.
The copper, gold, lead, and iron of Spain, now belonged to Rome.
Masinissa was recognized as the king of Numidia and the ally of Rome.
Carthage was to pay an annual tribute of 200 talents (about $250,000) for fifty years.
Carthage agreed not to wage any war without the consent of Rome.

**The Fate of Hannibal**
Hannibal never forgot the oath of eternal enmity to Rome.
When Antiochus agreed to surrender him, Hannibal fled to Crete.
Later he took refuge with the king of Bithynia.
Here he continued his hostility to Rome.
He aided Bithynia in a war against Rome’s ally, the king of Pergamum.
The Romans still pursued him, and sent Flamininus to demand his surrender.
But Hannibal again fled.
On 183 BC, this great soldier took his own life by drinking poison.

**Third Punic War**

**Beginning of the Third Punic War**
Following the Second Punic War there was peace for 50 years.
Carthage showed signs of regaining their power.
The Carthaginians were commanded to give up three hundred of their noblest youths as hostages.
The hostages were accordingly given up.
The Carthaginians were then informed that they must surrender all their arms and munitions.
This hard demand was also complied with, and Carthage became defenseless.
The demand was now made that, as the city was fortified.
The city must too be given up, and the inhabitants must remove to a point ten miles from the coast.
To such a revolting and infamous command the Carthaginians could not yield. In 149 BC, Rome attacked Carthage.

**Siege and Destruction of Carthage (B.C. 146)**

Carthage was without arms, without war ships, without allies. To make new weapons, the temples were turned into workshops. The women cut off their long hair to be twisted into bowstrings. Supplies were collected for a long siege. For three long years the brave Carthaginians resisted every attempt to take the city. They repelled the assault upon their walls. They were then cut off from all communication with the outside world by land. They sought an escape by the sea. Their communication by water was then cut off by a breakwater, built by the Romans. They cut a new outlet to the sea. They then secretly built fifty war ships, and attacked the Roman fleet. But all these heroic efforts simply put off the day of doom. At last, under Scipio Aemilianus, the Romans forced their way through the wall. The city was taken street by street, and house by house. Carthage became the prey of the Roman soldiers. Its temples were plundered. Its inhabitants were carried away as captives. By the command of the senate, the city itself was consigned to flames. In 146 BC, Carthage was destroyed. The Romans even plowed salt into the fields around Carthage so that nothing could ever grow there again. Corinth was destroyed because it refused to obey a Roman order. Rome became the leading power of the Mediterranean world.

**Effects of Conquest**

With conquest came wealth and this changed Rome's economy and government. Among the changes were the replacement of small farms by large estates, the coming of slavery, a movement from farms to cities, and the decline of the Roman republic.

**Agricultural Changes**

The size and purpose of farms changed.

**Small Farms**

Small farmers believed in hard work and service to Rome. Small farms were replaced by large estates called latifundias. Small farms grew wheat for food.

**Latifundias**

Latifundias produced crops, sheep, and cattle for sale at market. Olives and grapes were also grown on these large estates. Rome no longer grew their own wheat. Rome had to import wheat from Sicily and North Africa.

**Reason for Change**

The reason for this was Hannibal's invasion of Italy. Hannibal's soldiers lived off the land when they were in Italy. Roman farmers burned their fields and crops to prevent them from getting food. After the Second Punic War, the land was ruined. Small farmers did not have money to restore their land. Patricians and rich business men bought the small farms. They combined the small farms to create Latifundias.
Slavery

Rome did not enslave people they conquered. By 146 BC, this was no longer true. Romans were impressed by the wealth of Greece, Syria, and Carthage. These places had slavery. Romans sent thousands of prisoners to Rome as slaves. Most of the slaves lived and worked on Latifundias.

From Farm to City

Farmers who sold their land could work for the new owners or move to the city. Almost all moved to Rome. The farmers lived in wooden apartment buildings. Some of the apartment buildings were six or more stories high. Living conditions were terrible. The aqueducts were not connected to the apartment buildings. The sewers that carried waste away were not connected. Buildings often caught fire or collapsed. Diseases like typhus were common. Most farmers could not make a living in the city. The only industry was construction. Most businesses were run by slaves from Greece. Farmers could get money by selling their vote to politicians.

Decline of the Roman Republic

Rome eventually began to demand taxes and slaves from conquered areas. Rome sold tax contracts to "publicans." They paid the taxes ahead of time and charged the conquered people 10% interest. Most publicans made extra money. By 135 BC, Rome was in trouble. Farmers had no money. Rich Romans got their luxuries elsewhere. Artisans lost business. Government officials were busy getting rich.

Rich and Poor

The gap between the rich and poor grew greater. The poor hated the rich for what they had done to them. The rich hated and feared the poor. Rome was no longer politically stable.

Roman Leadership

Over the next 100 years, many leaders tried to improve conditions in Rome. Some were reformers and others were generals.

The Reformers

Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus
Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus was the first reformer. He thought making small farmers leave the land was the problem. 133 BC, he became a tribune. He wanted to limit the amount of land a person could own. He wanted to divide up public lands and give them to the poor.
Tiberius Gracchus ran for a second term as tribune. That was against the law. The Senate staged a riot and killed Gracchus and hundreds of his followers.

Gaius Gracchus
In 123 BC, Gaius Gracchus was elected tribune. He was the brother of Tiberius. He wanted to move the poor from the city back to the country. He had the government take over the sale of wheat. Soon one out of 3 Romans was receiving free wheat. In 121 BC, the Senate, feeling threatened, had Gaius killed.

The Generals
General Gaius Marius
In 107 BC, General Gaius Marius became consul. He was the first lower-class Roman to be elected high office. He was supported by ex-soldiers. Many of the ex-soldiers had lost their farms when they were in the army. He wanted to set up a professional army. In the past, only property owners could be legionaries. Marius opened the army to all. He got the poor to join by offering pay, land, pensions, and booty. Marius' plan helped out-of-work Romans. Instead of loyalty to the government, the soldiers were loyal to Marius.

General Lucius Cornelius Sulla
Marius was opposed by General Lucius Cornelius Sulla. Sulla was given a command Marius wanted. Sulla tried to get the Assembly to give it to him. Sulla marched on Rome and seized the city. Civil War broke out. Sulla began a reign of terror in Rome. He killed everyone in Rome who had opposed him. Sulla then made himself absolute dictator. He wanted to increase the power of the Senate. He doubled the size of the Senate. He gave the Senators more duties. He weakened the power of the tribunes. He stopped generals from holding command for more than one year.

Julius Caesar
Triumvirate
In 60 BC Sulla retired. A triumvirate controlled Rome. Marcus Lucinius Crassus, Gnaeus Pompeius, and Julius Caesar made it up. Pompey believed in rule by the upper-class. Caesar believed in one man rule. Crassus died and Pompey was murdered. In 48 BC, Caesar gained control.

Conquests
58 BC, Caesar named governor of a Roman province. He built up a strong army. He conquered Gaul, Belgium and invaded Britain. In 50 BC, the Senate ordered Caesar to break up his legions and return to Rome.
Caesar entered Rome at the head of his army. 
By 46 BC, he was dictator of Rome.

Achievements of Caesar
Re-divided state lands. 
Gave land to ex-soldiers by founding new overseas colonies.
He began public works projects.
He built roads, buildings, and drained the marshes around Rome. 
This gave jobs to thousands of Romans.
He planned and paid for free gladiatorial games. 
This gave the poor and idle something to do.
He doubled the size of the Senate.
It gave business people a chance to be a Senator.
He cut back on the activities of publicans.
He gave Roman citizenship to Greeks, Spaniards, and Gauls.
He adopted the Julian calendar, based on the Egyptian calendar.

Assassination of Caesar
Some Romans were afraid that Caesar planned to make himself king.
15 March 44 BC, 60 Senators stab Caesar to death on the Ides of March.

End of the Republic
The Roman people turned against the people that had killed Caesar.
Political power passed to Mark Antony, Octavian, and Marcus Aemilius Lepidus.
Mark Antony was Caesar's closest follower and general.
Octavian was Caesar's adopted son.
Marcus Aemilius Lepidus one of Casar's top officers.
This triumvirate worked for awhile.
Fights broke out in 31 BC, Octavian had won.